

After the Incident by dragonartist5

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Hurt-Comfort, Sci-Fi

Language: English

Characters: Eleven/Jane H., Joyce B., Mike W., Will B.

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-01-15 01:34:29

Updated: 2017-01-15 01:34:29

Packaged: 2019-12-17 15:00:14

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,381

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: (One-Shot) El, Mike, Will, Jonathan and Joyce find ways to cope after the events of November, 1983

After the Incident

post-trau-mat-ic stress dis-order, definition: a psychological reaction occurring after experiencing a highly stressing event (as wartime combat, physical violence, or a natural disaster) that is usually characterized by depression, anxiety, flashbacks, recurrent nightmares, and avoidance of reminders of the event. *Courtesy of Merriam Webster Dictionary.*

The doctors say Will will be dealing with it for the rest of his life. He spends three weeks in the hospital. He is weak, and his eyes are shadowed. His skin is still deathly pale. The doctors say he will need to gain mental and physical strength. He will need the mental capacity to battle the nightmares and panic attacks that come swiftly and relentlessly in the months that follow. He will need to keep himself from being consumed by the fear. He is not alone in this battle.

They gave Joyce a medication and a little clipping with information about the disorder. They told her to get some rest. It's lucky Hopper sticks around.

Karen and Ted Wheeler are oblivious to their son's nightmares. He doesn't scream, he suffocates. They don't know about the hopeless entanglement of his thoughts and emotions with that of a strange girl's thoughts and emotions. They don't know that loving her is like carrying around a walkie talkie that transmits voices, but also thoughts. She cries and begs for him in the early hours of the morning. It tears him apart, but it helps them heal.

He's glad she lets him be her anchor. He's her cornerstone and her constant. He is the definition of safety. He is comfort. He is warm. He is a friend. He is a promise.

They share something very unique, but strong. Overwhelming.

Personally, I think it goes beyond friendship, though Karen and Ted will tell you they are too young to feel something like love. I think they are wrong.

The truth is, nobody walks away from November of 1983 without a scratch. Scars, paranoia, and fear touch all of them in some way or another. Their monsters are not gone. They never really go away.

They find their own ways to cope.

Will heals. He heals with the help of his brother. Joyce. His friends. He is tattered and broken, but he is alive and that's all that really matters. He draws his demons. He doesn't really know why, exactly. He figures if they exist on paper, they're a little easier to defeat.

Will begins to win his battles.

The nightmares lessen, at least a little. Still, he wakes with tears in his eyes and screams on his lips. His mother is always there, at the foot of his bed, there to hold him while he pours himself into her arms. It breaks her, too.

Still, they heal. The sharp stones smooth under their feet as time marches on.

Jonathan buries himself in his work. He works long hours, comes home ragged. Will waits for him. Jonathan will pull out his latest pictures, to share them with Will. If there's time, they might put on some music. If there's time, they heal.

Joyce tackles each day with a cigarette between her teeth and a kiss planted on Will's forehead. She, not unlike her son, puts her energy into work. She talks to Hop, who's always there with open arms and a couple of beers. With a push and shove, a little help from Flo, they go to dinner and a movie. Will swears he sees a few lines disappear from his mother's face that night.

Dustin and Lucas are gentle with Will. They tread lightly around Mike. They go to the arcade, throw themselves into the latest D&D campaign. They do not deny themselves the simple pleasures that come with Mr. Clark's brand new Heathkit.

Mike deteriorated before their very eyes, in those three months. The three months without El. He became a ghost, fragile and distant. Until the day she showed up, half-dead in the snow.

He smiled for the first time in 84 days. Lucas swears by it, having been lucky enough to witness such a spectacle as Mike Wheeler smiling. Actually *smiling*.

Every night, he is woken from his nightmares by her voice in his Super Com. He swallows his screams and tells her stories. The word *promise* is a constant. It is spoken over and over again, shared between them. It's the closest thing to those other three words, but he wouldn't dare say them. Not yet.

One day, he finds her locked in a closet, barely conscious. He drops to his knees on the floor, holding her while she cries, trying and failing to suppress his own tears. She traces his freckles with shaking fingers. He feels her shatter in his arms, and realizes he is powerless against the shadows that exist in her head. He'll try to battle them for the rest of their lives.

Will draws his demons. Mike spends his days trying to chase hers away.

Mike buries himself in his campaigns. He takes every chance to be with El. He serves his part in her haphazard education. He reads to her, but gets bored and begins to craft a story of his own. She falls asleep with her nose buried into his chest and he thinks he loves her then.

El scarcely lets go of his hand. Quickly, she learns that the only place in the world she belongs in right here, by his side. She belongs in Joyce's brightly lit kitchen. She belongs in Mike's basement. She belongs with the boys, playing D&D on Saturday mornings. She belongs in the passenger seat of Hop's car, giggling at his terrifying attempts to sing along to the radio.

She drowns in her sheets at night, but his voice never fails to call her back. She reads in the sunlight, on the back porch. She ignores Hop's teasing about 'That Wheeler Boy'. He talks so much, and his voice is comfort and she finds herself drowning in an entirely new way. She gets lost in the glorious blur of summer, and in the giddy exhilaration that comes with a taste of her new reality. She's falling, and falling fast. He gave her a name and a new beginning and he loves her.

She receives a bike when she turns thirteen. She receives a legal identity before her fourteenth.

She is reunited with her mother in November of 1984, with help from Hopper. There is hesitation between them, misunderstandings and unspoken apologies. They learn to mend that broken promise, with time and a bit of trust. They build a bond that was stolen from them so many years ago, by a man named Dr. Martin Brenner.

She attends school with Mike and the boys at age sixteen. She heals, her hair grows, she chases Papa's shadow away. She learns to hide the tattoo. She returns his kisses, which come to mean so much more as they grow older. Eleven becomes Eleanor. Eleven becomes Jane. Eleven becomes Future Mrs. Wheeler, courtesy of Dustin. Eleven becomes the actual Mrs. Wheeler in late August, 1996. Eleven becomes El. Simply, El. She likes it that way. She is so much more than what the bad men made her.

The boys (and El) heal together. Though no one likes to admit it, they have grown up so much faster because of that one November. They are never the same.

Will draws the monsters in his nightmares and Jonathan works long hours. Joyce and Hop drown in empty bottles and ashtrays, but come to understand one another. Mike loses sleep over a battle with El's shadows. She never lets go of his hand.

The scars are there. They'll never really go away. For better or worse, they are merely results. Results of a nightmare all of them are quite keen to forget.

A/N: This is simply therapy. I can't get enough of this series. If you haven't, check out my recent (now completed) work, "Lost and Found". A sequel is currently in progress and I will be publishing the first chapters very soon . . .